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ABSTRACT

The paper explores the relationship of women's childbearing attitudes to educational and work opportunities. Program administrators for family planning, educational programs, and national development efforts in developing countries must realize the importance of the social and cultural environment in designing programs to reduce population growth. Section one discusses the impact of education on women's attitudes toward childbearing. Schooling exposes women to new kinds of information, can promote positive changes in self-image, can change the nature of maternal ambitions, and can motivate women to pursue activities outside the family. Section two explores the apparent relationship between opportunities for women to work and low birth rates. Employment may discourage childbearing because of the burdensome dual workload of working mothers. Young women's earning abilities may encourage parents to delay arrangements for early marriages for their daughters. Employment also can offer women various degrees of economic and psychological independence. Section three urges population program administrators to realize that status, income, security, and emotional satisfaction may be reasons for women to have families, but that education and work opportunities can satisfy those needs as well. Successful programs of community education and development for women in Korea and Cuba are described to illustrate this point. (Author/AV)

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Women and Population Growth: Choice Beyond Childbearing

Kathleen Newland

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It was a happy coincidence that the United Nations placed two international years of concern, one for population and one for women, on successive pages of its annual calendar. The people who pay attention to events like 1974's World Population Year and 1975's International Women's Year—people inside governments, international bureaucracies, private foundations, research institutes, and the communications industry—found themselves thinking about the two subjects almost simultaneously. The juxtaposition of the U.N. years may have been responsible for the spurt of interest in the connection between women's roles and population growth. Whatever the reason, sometime during the mid-seventies population planners discovered women, and vice versa.

Any effort to understand the link between women's roles and population growth must begin by looking at the conditions that motivate women either to expand or to limit the size of their families. The present attempt starts with the assumption that women who have a lot of children usually are responding in a rational manner to a set of real incentives, positive or negative. The balance of rewards and costs associated with childbearing may appear more favorable than that connected with any alternative use of a woman's time and energy. There may even be penalties for low fertility, ranging from disapproval to divorce or abandonment. A policy aimed at bringing down the birth rate has a much greater chance of success if its designers take into account the reasons behind a woman's personal decision about family size.

The failure of many family planning programs over the last decade or two is in part a measure of their failure to approach women as whole individuals. Programs that deal with women merely as reproductive beings can hardly bring about the broad social changes prerequisite to fundamental changes in attitudes toward family size. One straw man that badly needs knocking down is the population plan-

6 ner who expects that, in the absence of some intrusion, women will simply go on breeding as long as they are able. The assumption that there is a child-shaped void in the heart, mind, and body of every woman creates an adversary relationship between women and population planners. The conflict is unproductive for both sides, and unnecessary as well, for though they may have different goals uppermost in their minds, the two have a great deal of common ground to cover.

Both women and men need to have some sense of purpose and accomplishment in life. Few people have a vast array of choices about how to find that sense of fulfillment. For many, the answer is so obvious that it hardly amounts to a choice. One takes one's place in the established order of one's immediate surroundings—whether as hired-laborer, teacher, merchant, bureaucrat, landlord, housewife, farmer, or some combination of such roles. The context defines the possibilities for everyone, but it usually defines them more narrowly for women than for men.

For most women, purpose and accomplishment have been defined largely—and sometimes almost exclusively—in terms of motherhood. What must be realized, however, is that the centrality of women's maternal role is a social construct, not a biological trait. Family planning programs that fail to grasp that point, however well-intentioned they are, adopt an attitude toward women that is fundamentally coercive. "What can we do to make them stop having all those babies?" is an approach that, no matter how much it relies on carrots rather than on sticks, views women as objects to be manipulated rather than as partners in a common endeavor.

Social systems whose positive images of women are all linked to the reproductive role leave women only one path to a sense of purpose and accomplishment. Most societies have gone further, constructing formidable roadblocks along every other path. A constructive approach to controlling population growth would be one that sought to dismantle the roadblocks along women's alternate paths, and indeed helped them open new paths toward fulfillment.

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Women have many different kinds of needs, just as men do, such as a claim on economic resources, physical health and comfort, security, approval from others, participation in the life of the community, personal autonomy, love, and recognition. The answer to the perennial question "What does woman want?" is located somewhere in that thicket of needs. Maternity can realistically be viewed by women as a means of fulfilling their own needs. Where women are isolated within their families, lack opportunities for remunerative employment, and are blocked by illiteracy from contact with the larger society, their choices among possible means to fulfillment are so narrow that childbearing stands out clearly as the preferable alternative. Parenthood has its own intrinsic rewards, but the ways in which it serves other needs should not be overlooked. If policies and programs can be designed to help women achieve their goals by means other than motherhood, two very important objectives can be met at once: raising the status of women and lowering the birth rate.

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The Impact of Education

The impact of women's education on fertility has been closely studied. In the search for a quick fix to the population problem, policymakers have seized upon studies showing that educated women tend to have fewer children than do unschooled women. The implied promise of this research seems almost too good to be true: that the pursuit of the relatively uncontroversial goal of universal education might provide a key to the delicate and bitterly contested issue of population control.

In almost every country, the more education women have, the fewer children they bear. For example, in a 1972 study from Jordan of women aged 30-34, illiterate women were found to have an average of 6.4 children while those with a primary-school education averaged 5.9. For secondary-school graduates, the average was 4.0; and for university-degree holders, only 2.7 children.[1] Studies in Turkey and Egypt showed the same pattern. In Turkey, the average number of children ranged from 1.4 for college graduates to 4.2 for unschooled women. In the Egyptian survey, women who had finished university

averaged less than four children, compared with more than seven for illiterate women.[2]

The inverse correlation between women's education and fertility can be seen in most countries. There are a few interesting exceptions. In Indonesia, for example, birth rates are generally higher among women with more education. This apparent contradiction to the usual pattern is explained by the fact that most Indonesian women who manage to get an education come from higher-income families. At all economic levels, the traditional Indonesian society values large numbers of children, but only the relatively well-off can afford to put the ideal into practice—just as it is only the relatively well-off who can afford to keep their daughters in school. The relationship between education and fertility is so closely entangled with the income-fertility link that the direct influence of education is obscured. Within a single income class, however, the difference in birth rates for women of different educational levels seems to follow the expected pattern: the more education, the fewer children.[3]

Obviously, there is more to the relationship between education for women and lower fertility than simple cause and effect. Because it is easy to measure the amount of women's formal schooling and to count the numbers of their children, it is tempting to look at these two variables in isolation. But it is clear that other factors enter the fertility equation, and they may reinforce, contradict, or supplant the impact of education. It is important to try to understand the whole equation; otherwise, a policy designed to produce one effect might end up producing an entirely different one.

There are several ways in which education can influence women's fertility. First, women are exposed as students to new sources and new kinds of information. Secondly, by taking women outside their immediate families, school may bring about a change in their self-images, fostering independent values and aspirations. Thirdly, exposure to education—even if it is indirect—can change the nature of maternal ambitions: mothers who want their children to go to school have an interest in limiting their families to the number of

children they can afford to educate. Finally, education may motivate women to pursue activities outside the family, and equip them with the skills to do so.

The basic ability to read and write enables a woman to reach out beyond her immediate circle of human contact to a world of new ideas and facts. The written word is the cheapest, most durable, and most accessible medium of indirect communication. Virtually every national development campaign has mass literacy as one of its primary goals, for an illiterate population, once out of earshot, is unreachable.

Lenin, writing during World War I, when 88 percent of Russian women were illiterate, acknowledged the importance of literacy to informed participation in politics. "A person who can neither read nor write," he said, "is outside politics; he must first learn the ABCs, without which there can be no such thing as politics, only rumors, gossip, fairy tales, and prejudices."[4] Lenin's concern was political participation, but he might just as well have been writing about the informed practice of family planning.

Today, a higher proportion of the world's women can read and write than ever before. Yet population growth has meant that the absolute number of illiterate women continues to swell, having already reached half a billion in 1970. Like other scarce resources, education tends to be offered preferentially to males; nearly two-thirds of the world's illiterate population is female, and that proportion is increasing. As the number of men unable to read and write rose by eight million between 1960 and 1970, the number of women so handicapped increased by 40 million. In Asia, Africa, and the Arab states, the female illiteracy rate is as much as 25 percentage points higher than the male rate.[5]

The countries with the lowest birth rates in the world also have high levels of female education. The countries of Eastern Europe and Scandinavia, the Soviet Union, Germany, Britain, Japan, Canada, and the United States all have birth rates near the replacement level; some

of these countries' populations are actually decreasing slightly.[6] In all of them, equal numbers of boys and girls are enrolled in school, at least up to the secondary level. Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Canada, Russia, and the United States annually graduate more girls than boys from high school. In the United States, college enrollment was 52 percent female in 1977.[7]

In the Third World, the countries that have the lowest birth rates are also the ones with relatively high levels of education, for women as well as for men. Most, though not all, also have higher average incomes than their neighbors. Argentina, Uruguay, South Korea, Singapore, and Sri Lanka are among the countries with these characteristics. Sri Lanka is particularly interesting because it is poor. Its low birth rate cannot be attributed to economic development. Rather, the move toward smaller families in that country is usually attributed to the high level of social services, including income-distribution programs such as food subsidies; widely available medical care (which has lowered the infant mortality rate by 70 percent over the last 25 years); and education.[8]

Basic education can have both a direct and an indirect effect on fertility. Literacy facilitates the distribution of birth control information—not only information about obtaining services, but also the more basic understanding of how and why different methods work, and of the advantages and disadvantages of each method. Information is a great antidote to the fears and misapprehensions that surround this sensitive subject. An opinion survey of women in Jordan in 1972 found a dramatic correlation between educational levels and attitudes toward family planning. Women were asked whether they approved or disapproved of family planning: of those who disapproved, "80 percent were illiterate, 16 percent had received primary education, 3 percent had attended preparatory school, and 0.6 percent had attended secondary school. No university women disapproved of family planning."[9]

On the basis of observations like those in the Jordanian study, optimism about the acceptance of family planning is bound to grow as

women's access to education improves. In most countries today, girls stand a better chance of going to school than their mothers did. The generational differences can be startling, so rapid is the pace of change in some regions. In a Javanese village studied by Valerie Hull, the proportion of women who had never been to school declined from two-thirds of the women aged 30-39 to about one-fifth of those aged 20-29, and then to only one-twentieth of the group aged 10-19 years.[10] In Tunisia in 1966, 34 percent of women aged 15-19 were literate, compared to 3 percent of those aged 35-44.[11] If the increasingly larger ranks of educated women in these countries follow patterns of childbearing similar to those of educated women in most other countries (and in the older age groups of their own), national population growth rates could fall quite dramatically.

The how and why of birth planning can be taught along with basic literacy skills. Indeed, educational programs are more effective when they use teaching materials that are relevant to their students' lives. A reading lesson can include information on agricultural methods, nutrition, or family planning. Several programs have begun to incorporate such material into adult literacy training.

Population education should not be confined to adults, however, for attitudes about family size are formed early in life. The Korean Educational Development Institute recently completed an extensive revision of all public-school textbooks. As the changes are implemented nationwide in 1978, population education will be incorporated at every level of the curriculum. The revisions are designed to promote sexual equality, to attack the deep-seated parental preference for sons, and to instill an appreciation of the national as well as the personal consequences of higher fertility.[12]

In the long run, the process of going to school may be as important as course content is in changing basic attitudes about childbearing and family planning. People who have been educated have some experience of mastering the unknown—even if the unknown is nothing more formidable than the alphabet. Education is a doorway to knowledge and confidence—two essential components of independent decision-making.

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For many women and girls, the classroom is the first and perhaps the only setting in which they perform as individuals rather than as members of a particular family, the only context in which they can achieve a sense of worth and identity that does not come from their roles as wives or mothers or daughters. In this, the school serves not only as a source of new knowledge about the world outside their immediate communities, but as a source of new knowledge about themselves as well.

Education confers status in its own right, and may also give a woman access to prestigious activities that rival childbearing in their ability to secure for her an approved place in her social universe. In an Indonesian village recently, an American visitor was surprised to find a young woman with only one child at the head of the local women's organization in a community where advanced age and high fertility are revered. He was told that the village women had selected her for the position, despite her youth and inexperience, because she was the most highly educated among them. This particular woman seemed to have circumvented the large-family route to a position of respect in her community.[13]

The availability and prestige of education may alter a woman's perception of her maternal role, even if she herself has not been to school. In rich countries and poor alike, most people view education as prerequisite to a good job and general social advancement. It is, accordingly, something that most parents want for their children. It may assume particular importance in societies where the traditional framework of social status is weakening or has broken down. Education is the great leveler, and the dream of the bright child of humble origins who achieves high distinction is a powerful one all over the world.

Even where education is technically free, there are costs associated with sending a child to school. Cash outlays may be required for books or uniforms. The child's labor in the household must be replaced by the work of other family members, by hiring help, or simply by doing without some services. The cost of higher education

"For many women and girls, the classroom is the first and perhaps the only setting in which they perform as individuals rather than as members of a particular family."

is great in relation to average incomes in most countries. Many parents decide, therefore, to limit their families to the number of children they think they can afford to educate. A few educated children are seen to provide greater status and security for their parents, especially in the face of crowded, competitive job markets.

Where education is highly valued and extremely competitive, parents may develop high emotional and psychological stakes in their children's schooling. The Japanese have coined a word for the women who makes a full-time career of shepherding her offspring through the academic minefield; it translates roughly as "education mother."[14] The Japanese education mothers, and their counterparts in other countries, invest enormous time and energy in their children. Many parents feel that a family cannot fulfill its responsibility to more than two children. In a 1969 survey, Japanese wives were asked to give their reasons for practicing contraception. More than half of the women surveyed said that one of their motives was "to give the children a good education," and in fact this was the most frequently heard answer. By contrast, only one in five gave economic constraints as a reason for limiting family size. The more highly educated the mother herself was, the more likely she was to consider the children's education an important rationale for family planning.[15]

Another way in which education acts to lower fertility is by making it more likely that a woman will be employed outside the home. The relationship between employment and childbearing is considered in the next section; the impact of education on employment is discussed below.

The education-employment link is especially strong if a woman's schooling extends through the secondary level, and secondary-school enrollment of women is increasing in most countries. In 1967, 60 states reported to UNESCO that more than 46 percent of their students in secondary schools were female. In 1950, only 30 countries reported that they had passed the 46-percent mark. In most cases, the enrollment of girls has been increasing more rapidly than that of boys, though discrepancies still exist in many regions. For exam-

ple, in North Africa and the Middle East, only one-fifth to one-third of the secondary-school students are women.[16] This helps to explain why female employment rates in the region are among the lowest in the world. In Egypt, Syria, and Turkey, 21 percent of female secondary-school graduates were in the nonagricultural labor force in the early 1960s, compared with just 4 percent of the women with only primary schooling.[17]

An analysis of the participation of married women in the Brazilian labor force according to their levels of education reveals a pattern that is found in many developing countries.[18] (See Table 1.) The proportion of illiterate women who were in the formal labor force in 1970 was only about one-eighth that of secondary-school graduates. The discrepancy widened to a factor of ten when illiterates were compared with university graduates. Overall employment rates for women in Brazil are almost as low as they are in Egypt, Syria, and Turkey—but in all four countries, two out of three female college graduates work.

Table 1: Labor Force Participation Rates for Married Women in Brazil, by Level of Education, 1970

Level of Education	Share in Labor Force	Share of Population
	(percent)	(percent)
Illiterate	6.3	39.6
Elementary incomplete	7.2	32.0
Elementary complete	12.1	21.9
Lower secondary	21.4	3.0
Higher secondary	49.4	2.9
University incomplete	54.2	0.1
University complete	65.8	0.5
All levels	9.9	100.0

Source: Glaura Vasques de Miranda.

The higher employment rates of educated women will have little impact on the general level of female employment or on overall fertility rates, however, if educated women form only a tiny fraction of the female population. In Brazil in 1970, less than 7 percent of all married women had gone as far as secondary school. The low average level of education was reflected in a low overall labor force participation rate.[19]

The Brazilian example, though discouraging, does hold out the hope that women's participation in the labor force might rise dramatically if their access to education were improved. The possibility depends, of course, on employment being available to the women as they emerge from the schools. Otherwise, they will have little alternative to a career of childbearing.

The highest employment rates are found among women who have taken advanced, professional training. In the United States, 91 percent of the women who earned doctoral degrees in 1957-58 were holding jobs eight years later. Increased female enrollment in graduate and professional schools is therefore a strong indicator that the number of women working will also increase—and that, in turn, bodes well for the birth rate. Among American women, professional-school attendance has been moving up sharply. Their share of law-school enrollment rose from 3 percent in 1960 to about 20 percent in 1977. American medical school deans predict that one-third of their students will be women in 1984, up from 18 percent in 1974 and from a mere 5 percent 20 years ago. The women who attain advanced, professional training are both prepared for and committed to careers.

Women's Work

When China launched its family planning program in the 1950s, its leaders staunchly maintained that the country had no population problem. The rationale for birth planning was that it would enable women to work and thereby to make a contribution to national development.[21] Today, development planners tend to look at the con-

nection from the other side: it is hoped that women's employment will lead to a lower birth rate, and thereby make the uphill climb to prosperity a little less steep.

It is easy to visualize the ways in which childbearing interferes with a woman's work. What is not so clear is how and why employment deters childbearing. It is generally true that countries with a low birth rate tend to have a relatively high proportion of women working, though the correlation is by no means perfect. The association between the two factors is consistent enough, however, to make the rising female employment rates in many parts of the world a cause for optimism about the chances of slowing population growth.

The proportion of adult women who are in the formal labor force varies enormously from country to country, and the trends are far from uniform. In most of the advanced, industrial countries, women's labor force participation is high. With a few exceptions among the more traditional societies like Spain and Italy (which also have some of the industrial world's highest birth rates), more than a third of adult women in developed nations are in the labor force. In Eastern Europe and Scandinavia, the proportion is well over half.[22]

In some of the industrial countries, the proportion of women who are in the labor force has increased dramatically since the late 1950s. Australia, Canada, Sweden, and the United States are among those that have experienced rapid rises. These countries also have birth rates so low that it is possible their populations could be stabilized by 1985 or sooner.[23] A 1977 study showed that the decline in the U.S. birth rate since the late 1950s has been proportional to the increase in the number of women of childbearing age holding jobs. The conventional wisdom about fertility patterns is that births tend to be more numerous in prosperous times and to level off in periods of recession. Yet during the past 25 years, the U.S. birth rate has been running counter to economic trends. The study concluded that the best explanation for the contradiction lies in the rapid rise in the number of women working, though no causal connection between the two trends was definitely proven.[24]

A rising female employment rate associated with a declining birth rate is not nearly so consistently observed among the developing countries. In some—like Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia—the work rate for women is on a par with the industrial countries, yet birth rates are also high, though declining slowly. In others, such as Sri Lanka and Chile, birth rates are relatively low although the proportion of women working is also low. South Korea and Taiwan are representative of a third group, countries that seem to be experiencing the transition familiar to the industrial world, with birth rates falling as female labor force participation rises. There is a fourth group comprised of countries where little improvement is occurring in either category: women do not work outside the home in large numbers and they continue to have many children.

The most discouraging countries in the fourth group are those in which women's employment opportunities are actually declining. In India, the proportion of adult women counted as being "economically active" was 28 percent in 1961. By 1971, it had declined to a mere 12 percent.[25] In Peru, the proportion dropped from 22 percent in 1961 to 15 percent in 1972.[26] In deteriorating economies, the quality of women's work has tended to decline along with its quantity, with jobs in the modern sector the first to become inaccessible to women. Guatemala in 1950 had 193 male workers in the nonagricultural labor force for every 100 female workers. By 1973 the men outnumbered the women by 229 to 100—and two-thirds of these women worked as maids.[27]

With such an array of observed patterns, it must be clear that the relationship between female employment and fertility is not a simple one. In the first place, working is not a matter of choice for extremely poor women, or for women who are heads of households. No matter how many children a poor woman in Indonesia, rural Africa, or urban Peru has, she must go on working for her own and her family's survival. Her "job commitment" is absolute. Fertility control is often involuntary, the result of long separations between spouses as one or both travel in search of work, a higher incidence of divorce, secondary sterility owing to ill health, or the inability to marry be-

cause of poverty. Thus, under conditions of extreme poverty, work for women cannot be seen as an alternative to childbearing, because neither of the two is freely chosen. The question of choice becomes meaningful only when women do have real options—to work or not to work, to have children or not to have children.

For women who do have an element of choice, however marginal, it is important to discover what kinds of employment deter childbearing, and why. There are negative elements to the association as well as positive ones. Employment may discourage women from having large families because the dual workload of a working mother is too burdensome. On the other hand, work may encourage women to limit their family size by providing them with sources of satisfaction and security outside the family.

Most of the discussion about the kinds of work that would most effectively reduce fertility has focused on the negative side of the equation. The "incompatibility" between work and motherhood has been stressed. It has been observed that certain kinds of work seem to have a minimal impact on the number of children a woman has: agricultural labor, cottage industries, traditional marketing, and unpaid household work.[28] The conventional explanation is that these jobs are too easily combined with the care of small children. Conversely, jobs that regularly take women away from home for long hours are seen to discourage childbearing by creating, in effect, a child-care problem. The inverse correlation between employment and fertility is therefore expected under conditions of maximum incompatibility. Having lots of children simply becomes too difficult for the working woman.

The incompatibility argument may fall well short of the mark in explaining why certain kinds of work lower fertility. Its exceptions are themselves revealing: the kinds of work that are compatible with child care are the very jobs that keep women, even while working, firmly within their traditional roles. They do little to change the worker's relations with her family, her exposure to the outside world, or her status and sense of autonomy.

"Work may encourage women to limit their family size by providing them with sources of satisfaction and security outside the family."

The inverse correlation between work and fertility may hold true even for traditional jobs when those jobs do something to set a woman apart from her usual context of home, family or farm. A 1974 study from Bangladesh, for example, showed that women working in agriculture had lower fertility than expected. Adrienne Germaine, referring to the study, wrote: "It is plausible in the Bangladesh context to argue that agricultural work that takes women out of their homes broadens their horizons, changes their relationship to their husbands, and therefore contributes to contraceptive practice."[29] Such a job may expose a woman to the opinions and problems of other women, lessen her absolute dependence on her family for economic and psychological support, increase her freedom of movement, or bring her into contact with new ideas and sources of information. In other words, working outside of her traditional setting may enable a woman to see herself apart from her immediate family, where her primary reason for being is motherhood. The job is a mirror in which the working woman sees reflected a different image of herself. The new self-image may be a more important influence on her fertility than the incompatibility of home and work roles.

The incompatibility argument can lead to destructive policies based on the conflict between working women's two roles. Such policies may backfire: when the pressure of combining employment and motherhood increases to such a level that something has to give, what gives may well be work. The logic of incompatibility leads to low priority for child care, maternity leave, and nursing time for working mothers, for fear that such support might make it too easy for women to combine work and motherhood. This line of reasoning underestimates the degree to which child-care and other support services expand women's options by releasing their time and energy from purely domestic activities.

Ignoring the need for social services to assist parents could, in fact, have a strong pro-natalist impact. The absence of day care for children, maternity leave with job protection, and related public or private services pushes women firmly into the role of full-time

motherhood by making it difficult for them to shoulder a dual role. Few women (or men) willingly decide to forgo parenthood altogether. Yet any woman who undertakes to combine motherhood with a career, or some other non-maternal role, will find herself much more likely to succeed in both if she limits the number of children she has. Lack of social services pushes women toward an all-or-nothing choice between committed employment and parenthood.

Another approach to the employment-fertility link emphasizes young women's earning ability as an incentive for parents to avoid arranging or encouraging early marriage for their daughters. As a Malaysian rural development expert explained to an American observer: "Parents are able to see that even girls can get jobs nowadays . . . In previous times a girl was an economic burden to a large family, so there was pressure to get rid of her in marriage as fast as possible; but nowadays girls can be seen as an economic advantage instead of a liability."[30]

Delaying women's marriage does, of course, usually delay their entry into the childbearing cycle. Even a short period of employment has merit from a demographic point of view, for young women would be producing cheap shoes or textiles rather than babies. It is not necessarily liberating for women, however: it can change the way in which young women are exploited by their families, but fail to relieve them from exploitation. From the point of view of the young women, the result may be no improvement on their previous conditions; marriage and children may, in fact, provide a welcome escape from a low-level job. The employment episode is tempting as a basis for policy because it does not seem to demand the broadly-based social change that building a genuine basis for independence among women would require.

Employment may be a genuine learning experience for some young women—the beginning of a sense of personal autonomy, responsibility, rising expectations, and economic and psychological independence from their families. But for many women, a low-level job

is a grinding experience. An illegal strike by South Korean garment workers in May 1977 called attention to the working conditions of young women in one particular factory. Most of the workers at the Namyeong Nylon Company were women in their early twenties. Their pay ranged from U.S. $24 to $63 a month for working six-day weeks—and they were better off than many other young female workers.[31] Statistics issued earlier that year by the South Korean Office of Labor Affairs reported that 80 percent of the workers earning less than the official minimum wage of $42 per month were women, more than half of whom were under 18 years of age. The majority of these women work eight to ten hours per day, six days a week; a third were said to work more than 15 hours each working day.[32]

A job that allows a worker no control over the work environment is unlikely to be liberating. In a vocational training center outside of Sfax, Tunisia, a young woman explained to Perdita Huston how her work replicated the limiting conditions of her family life. Her father and brothers were convinced to allow her to go to the center only by virtue of its isolation and "safety," and because her income-earning ability would be an asset to the family. As the girl explained it, "I came here from one prison, my home, to another prison, here, at this center, in a remote village. When I return to Sfax, I will go back to the first prison. If ever I marry, I will go to a third prison, my husband's home."[33] Perhaps the skill learned at the center will be the key to a greater sense of autonomy for this young woman. If it is not, and nothing else fills the vacuum, it is unlikely that she will be able to resist the pressure to have many children when she marries.

What employment offers to women is, above all, a higher degree of control over their own lives. A woman who can earn her own living is not entirely dependent on others, economically or psychologically. If the conditions are right, working can satisfy needs that go beyond sheer physical maintenance. A description of China's network of semi-industrial and service jobs for women in rural areas points out some of the characteristics that make employment a real alternative to childbearing:

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> The worktime competes with domestic responsibilities, the work is highly valued, leadership and responsibility are shared among the workers, and peers exert strong pressure on their co-workers to stay on the job. Jobs remove young people from the exclusive sphere of parents' influence, and expose them to an egalitarian ethos in a context of peer support.[34]

This kind of work experience, however idealized this particular description may be, is one that can truly "compete" with childbearing. The relationship between employment and childbearing is not simply displacement of time and energy spent on one with time and energy spent on the other. It is rather an addition of one source of reward—social and psychological as well as economic—to another. Employment policies should not try to keep women so busy that they do not have time for child-rearing. A sound policy must aim to expand women's choices, on the assumption that women are no more naturally inclined to limit themselves to motherhood than men are inclined to limit themselves to fatherhood.

Programs and Policies

The starting point for a successful policy is to ask the right question. For policies dealing with women's roles and population growth, the right question is not how to prevent women from having large families, but rather how to make it possible for them to have small ones. Provision of contraceptive and abortion services is one part of this, but beyond that lies the far larger and more complex task of changing the social context in which decisions about childbearing are made.

In male-dominated societies, children are one of the few resources that women control. The less control women have over other kinds of resources, the more firmly they are forced into reliance on childbearing as a form of leverage on their environments. For many women, having a large number of children is the best available means for meeting their own needs. It is not necessarily an ideal method for

"Women are no more naturally inclined to limit themselves to motherhood than men are inclined to limit themselves to fatherhood."

the individual woman: many pregnancies may undermine her physical health, and providing for the needs of small children may restrict her ability to engage in other activities. But as we have seen, most women have limited options. Policymakers might usefully reach for a practical understanding of women's needs, and try to identify the ways in which childbearing contributes to the fulfillment of those needs.

Fertility is still a sign of good fortune, virtue, and wealth among many people, and women with large numbers of children are looked upon with high favor. For centuries women have been told that motherhood is their highest possible achievement; St. Paul was certainly not the first to suggest that "Women will be saved through bearing children if she continues in faith and love, and holiness with modesty." (I Timothy, 2:15) Women's other activities, however, have been overlooked and under-rewarded. A woman's work outside the home has commonly been seen as a source of shame rather than pride, indicating that a male "head of household" could not provide for "his" family. National account statistics have often overlooked women's economic activities when calculating GNP.[35] With other activities ignored or frowned upon, and with the maternal role glorified, childbearing is the major source of status for women.

Among the poor, both urban and rural, children often make a net contribution to the family income. This is changing somewhat in the face of compulsory education: children who attend school make less of a contribution to, and indeed are often a drain on, family resources. Still, an estimated 43 percent of all school-age children do not attend school.[36] Most of them, of course, live in poor countries where high population growth rates prevail.

Help with household tasks is needed by many, if not most, poor women, and in the cities children may bring in a significant cash income. Child labor is not seen as exploitive, but as an economic fact of life or even a benign influence on children because it teaches them responsibility at an early age. A study conducted in Lima, Peru, found that earnings of children between the ages of eight and twelve

often were essential components of poor families' income. The children worked at marketing, commercial food-preparation, or domestic service. In this particular urban setting, children sometimes made more money than their mothers. The study found that "children had sporadically assumed the role of worker and family provider, transforming the mothers (when ill or giving birth to another child) or both parents into their dependents."[37]

Few Third World countries have comprehensive, public social-security systems. Poverty among old people is not a problem that is confined to poor countries. But in the absence of a government-run social security system, parents must rely on their offspring for support when they themselves can no longer work. To be old and destitute is a common nightmare. It is a fate much more likely to fall upon a woman than a man: women of every age have fewer economic opportunities than men and, in most countries, women live longer. Children may be their only security against a poverty-stricken old age.

There are undoubtedly other practical reasons for having children. The emotional reasons are impossible to quantify, but they should not be underestimated. A study of poor working mothers in Lima used a novel research tool to gain some insight into the women's personal feelings and motivations. A team of researchers structured their interviews around a set of photographs depicting scenes from the daily lives of urban working-class women. The women interviewed responded most strongly to the pictures connected with pregnancy, childbirth, and parenthood. The picture the women thought the most beautiful of all showed a factory worker breast-feeding her baby. The research team concluded: "For nearly all proletarian working mothers, the experience of childbirth and motherhood—in spite of their economic situation—is the most meaningful experience of their lives, and the only one they can really claim as their own. It brings them, apparently, the only real feeling of fulfillment, a sense of sheer being, tenderness, and joy."[38] Women's programs—indeed, development programs in general—too often focus exclusively on basic, physical needs, ignoring the fact that people also have psychological, emotional, or spiritual needs. The

"Population policies must address themselves to the conditions that encourage people to have large families."

emotional satisfaction that children may bring into a woman's life is an all-too-scarce commodity.

Among the many reasons for having children, the four mentioned above—status, income, security, and emotional satisfaction—are powerful enough in themselves to constitute a legitimate rationale for childbearing from the individual's point of view. However, from the point of view of the community—whether local, national, or global—continued high fertility is a long-term recipe for disaster. The aim of population policy, therefore, must be to reconcile the interests of the individual with those of the community. In order to do this for women, it is necessary to provide alternative sources of status, income, security, and satisfaction.

Over the long term, high fertility is unlikely to be reduced significantly by exhortation alone. Population policies must address themselves to the conditions that encourage people to have large families. As one group of researchers working in East Asia maintains: "we should not expect rural families to have smaller families merely by promising them it will improve the quality of their lives. The order in which change occurs is crucial. People first need to experience some improvement in the quality of their lives, ideally through their own efforts, and then see for themselves the potential for more improvement if they have smaller families."[39]

Population programs have often appealed to women's self-interest by pointing out the health benefits of family planning for mothers and their children.[40] To the extent that they understand how optimal timing and spacing of pregnancies may enhance their children's chances of survival, women may be persuaded to limit their fertility. Low infant mortality is recognized as a precondition for acceptance of family planning.

The benefits for her own health, however, may not be a powerful enough incentive to reduce the number of children a woman wishes to have. Health is not necessarily given top priority in individual decision-making: witness the number of people who continue to

smoke in countries that have extensive educational campaigns about the hazards of tobacco use. Some of the objectives that women have in mind when making decisions about fertility may be more important to them than good health.

Even if maintenance of health is a high priority for the individual, it must be recognized that people do not make their decisions solely in terms of their own desires, however much they might wish to do so. They are constrained—especially those who live in traditional societies where individualism is not a highly valued social ethic—by the needs, demands, and expectations of others. A South Korean family planning official, when asked who made decisions about childbearing and family planning in a typical Korean family, suggested the following hierarchy: husband's mother, husband's father, husband, wife's mother, wife's father, wife. In other words, the individual who would most directly bear the burdens of having an additional child would be the last to be consulted about the decision.[41]

It is estimated that 10 percent of the Korean women who use the intrauterine device (IUD) hide the fact from their husbands; it is common even for modern professional couples to conceal their contraceptive usage from their parents.[42] The nightmare of family planners is the tearful young wife dragged into the clinic by her wrathful mother-in-law for removal of her IUD; it has happened more than once. Clearly, an important function of population programs is to provide support for the individual woman's (or couple's) decision to practice family planning in the face of powerful social, cultural, and economic pressures to the contrary.

Women of childbearing age can provide the needed support for each other if they are organized—formally or informally—in ways that give them the opportunity to talk to each other about their common problems, to gain access to the information they need to find solutions, and to direct their combined energies and resources to bringing about the chosen remedies. One of the most successful programs designed to foster peer networks among women is the Mothers' Club program sponsored by the Planned Parenthood Federation of Korea

(PPFK). Originally proposed in order to help distribute contraceptives and recruit new acceptors, the clubs have gone far beyond the support of family planning, though that remains one of their most important activities.

The village-level Mothers' Clubs in Korea have become cornerstones of the community development program by donating their labor and financial resources to such community projects as road building, drainage improvement, and construction of public buildings. Individual women also profit directly from membership through the clubs' savings schemes, cooperative income-earning projects, and so forth. Club activities have been an important avenue of upward mobility both for their members and for the communities of which they are a part. By integrating family planning with other activities beneficial to the villages, the clubs have helped overcome resistance to family planning. The Mothers' Club network—with more than 27,000 clubs and over 750,000 members—constitutes a double attack on population growth by providing its members with contraceptive services and advice on the one hand and status, income, and psychological support on the other.[43]

While Korea has a family planning program that turned into an integrated women's development program, Cuba has an integrated women's development program that has incorporated family planning as an essential component. The sponsoring organization is the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), founded in 1960 for the explicit purpose of bringing women into the mainstream of national endeavor. The program focused initially on adult literacy. Twenty-five thousand volunteers carried out an almost military campaign to teach the country's residents to read and write. The teaching materials of the campaign included practical information on subjects such as health care and hygiene; later, vocational training was introduced.

As the government tried to bring women into the labor force, the FMC program developed services to help working women with their domestic work loads. Child-care centers were established in housing developments, factories, and schools to care for the preschool-age

children of working mothers.[44] These services are not nearly comprehensive: the child-care centers in 1970, for example, could accommodate only 10 percent of the country's children aged 45 days to school age. The program's greatest success has been in education. By 1970 almost all women had access to primary-level education, and women made up half of the university enrollment. Women still work mainly in female-stereotyped occupations, but their participation in the labor force doubled between 1964 and 1970.[45]

Programs that integrate family planning with development explicitly recognize women as more than mothers. They deal with women as individuals and as members of a community, as people who have the latent will and collective power to improve their lives. They also recognize that many of women's aspirations are linked—for smaller families, remunerative employment, higher education, self-respect, and the approval of one's peers.

Programs that confine their efforts to family planning deal with women only in their reproductive role. A contradictory message is implicit: they seek to diminish the only role that they explicitly recognize for women. Integrated programs, on the other hand, support women in a variety of roles. In so doing, they enhance the credibility of family planning by presenting it as one of a number of steps that women can take to build a better life for themselves, their families, their countries, and their world.

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